



INSOLVENCY & BUSINESS RESCUE

Bafana Bafana's World Cup qualification hanging by a thread

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Bafana Bafana's prospects of taking to the field at next year's FIFA Mens' World Cup in North America have been dealt a potentially fatal blow, following the recent punishment meted out by FIFA's Disciplinary Committee.

The national team had picked up 3 points following a fairly routine win over Lesotho on 21 March 2025, and was confidently leading the table, with qualification in sight. However, the Lesotho victory has now been struck out by FIFA's ruling: the match has been forfeited (a 3-0 victory for Lesotho has substituted the on-the-field result), and Bafana has been docked the 3 valuable points. The lost points and punishing goal difference impact, drops the team to second place in the qualifying group, level on points with new leaders Benin, and now at threat from Nigeria. SAFA's fine of CHF10 000, added further salt to the wounds.

At the heart of the drama is Bafana midfielder Teboho Mokoena. He received two yellow cards in two separate matches, the first in Bafana's victory over Benin on 18 November 2023, and the second during the 11 June 2024 fixture against Zimbabwe. These months-old yellow cards have now come home to roost.

SAFA, as a member association of FIFA, is subject to FIFA's rules and regulations. One of FIFA's provisions is that of Regulation 67 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code (FDC), which stipulates that if a player receives a yellow card in two separate matches of the same FIFA competition (as was the case with Mokoena), the player is automatically suspended for the next match in that competition. For Mokoena, that next match was the Lesotho game.

Given that the first yellow card in question had been handed out some 16 months prior, it is perhaps understandable that SAFA officials missed the fact that Mokoena was not eligible to play against Lesotho. One could also be forgiven for thinking that there would have been a match official that might have raised the issue prior to kick off. This did not seem to be the case.

Instead, Mokoena took to the field against Lesotho, and ironically, turned out a decent performance. However, his inclusion in that match automatically constituted a contravention of Regulation 67. At first, it appeared that no-one seemed to notice the problem: no protest against Mokoena's involvement was made to FIFA within the standard 24 hour period following the match.

However, the contravention did not remain unnoticed, and did not go unpunished. Regulation 19 of the FDC read with Regulation 14 of the FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Competition Regulations, empowers FIFA's judicial bodies to impose appropriate disciplinary measures when an ineligible player is fielded in the FIFA World Cup 2026 preliminary competition. These additional measures include the deduction of points and the imposition of financial penalties.

On 29 September 2025, the FIFA Disciplinary Committee declared the match in question to have been forfeited, imposed a fine, and issued Mokoena with a warning. In the FIFA World Cup 2014 qualifying, Ethiopia was forced to forfeit a victory over Botswana, after fielding Minyahil Beyene, who was suspended for a near-identical contravention. Ethiopia, whose qualification prospects suffered a hammer blow, did not appeal FIFA's decision, or the fine imposed.

In the FIFA World Cup 2018 qualifying, Algeria was awarded a 3-0 victory over Nigeria, following Nigeria's fielding of Shehu Abdullahi, who also had picked up two yellow cards. Nigeria was also fined by FIFA.

What's next for SAFA? According to Regulation 54 of the FDC, SAFA has a period of ten days following notification of FIFA's punishment, to request from FIFA more detail of its decision. Once received SAFA will need to act swiftly, and lodge an appeal with the FIFA Appeal Committee within three days, followed by an appeal brief within five days thereafter. The rigid appeal procedure includes steep fees, meaning that SAFA's quest to persuade FIFA to overturn its ruling, will be a costly one.

For now, with only two games left, qualification will come down to the wire – Bafana must now win both remaining games, and convincingly, in order to maximise the prospect of appearing in the world sport's biggest showcase next year.



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